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Transcript for the video documentary:

By: James Corbett

The Media Matrix

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Media. It surrounds us. We live our lives in it and through it. We structure our lives around it. But it wasn't always this way. So how did we get here? And where is the media technology that increasingly governs our lives taking us? This is the story of **The Media Matrix**

TRANSCRIPT

In the beginning, there was the word. The *spoken* word, that is.

This word, the written word, didn't come along for countless generations.

And *this* word, the printed word, didn't come along for thousands of years after that.

In fact, we've only had the movable type printing press for about 600 years, but without it our world would be unrecognizable.

From the Renaissance to the Reformation, from the fall of feudalism to the rise of capitalism, from the Scientific Revolution to the Industrial Revolution, from the way we order our thoughts to what we choose to think about, *nothing* survived the printing revolution intact.

Our world is the world that the printing press has created.

And that world started with *this*. [Holds up mirror.]

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PART ONE: THE GUTENBERG CONSPIRACY

You see, in the Middle Ages, mirrors—especially curved mirrors—were fiendishly difficult to make.

And pilgrim badges—elaborately designed lead or pewter plates with a curved mirror in the middle—were even *more* difficult to make. But in fifteenth-century Germany, they were in hot demand.

It all goes back to the year 800, when Emperor Charlemagne gifted four holy relics from Jerusalem to the Cathedral in Aachen in modern-day Germany: the swaddling clothes and loin cloth of Jesus, Mary's robe, and the cloth that held John the Baptist's decapitated head. The relics were thought to have miraculous restorative powers. And so, after the Black Death of 1349, they were removed from the Cathedral's golden shrine and put on display for the public once every seven years, attracting tens of thousands of pilgrims from across Christendom.

Soon, the belief developed that a curved mirror could be held up to the relics to capture their miraculous powers and bring them back to the pilgrims' home in whatever far-flung land they hailed from.

Now, the mirror was not a mirror like the ones we're used to today. It was a pilgrim badge and it was one of the few mass-manufactured items of the Middle Ages. They were lucrative products to make. So lucrative, in fact, that the goldsmiths and stamp cutters of Aachen couldn't keep up with the demand.

Enter Johannes Gutenberg. Born around the turn of the fifteenth-century to a wealthy family in Mainz, in modern-day Germany, Gutenberg—whose father was a companion of the ecclesiastical mint—had a background in goldsmithing, coinmaking and metalwork.

Arriving in Strasbourg in 1434, he thought to put his skills to work on a profitable venture: creating badges for the next Aachen Pilgrimage in 1439. There was only one problem: he didn't have the capital to make the badges himself. So he entered into a cooperative with three business partners, each of whom ponied up a portion of the money required for Gutenberg to start producing the mirrors.

But just as the pilgrimage approached and it looked like the inventor was going to make a tidy profit for himself and his business partners, the Black Death struck again. An outbreak of the plague ravaged the Upper Rhine Valley in 1438, postponing the pilgrimage by a year. Gutenberg had already produced a number of the mirrors, but his capital was running out. And so he set his sights on a new venture—one so audacious, so revolutionary that he made his partners sign a contract swearing them to secrecy before he would let them in on it.

In fact, so secret was this project that the only reason we know anything at all about it is because one of the business partners died and his brother tried to take his place in the cooperative. But after the surviving partners refused to let him in on the plot, the would-be co-conspirator sued Gutenberg in Strasbourg court.

The court documents that survive are themselves cryptic—referring to the "adventure and art" of "the work" that Gutenberg and his partners were engaged in, but never specifying what that work *was*, exactly. We know that it involved presses fastened with screws and engraved "forms" supplied by a local goldsmith, that some quantity of metal had been purchased for the venture, that the work was expected to take five years and—above all—that the object of this undertaking be kept a secret.

Gutenberg and his partners had quite literally entered into a conspiracy.

And *that* conspiracy, resulted in *this*. Now this may not look like much to you . . . and you'd be right. *This* is a pencil sharpener. But the Gutenberg movable type printing press that it's modeled after? Now that truly *was* a work of art. In fact, there's a solid argument to be made that it was one of the most important inventions in human history.

There were many existing ideas and technologies that went into Gutenberg's creation: the screw press, the manufacture of paper, the idea of woodblock printing, the development of ink. But it took years of careful experimentation to solve the puzzle of how to create a perfect print every time.

At first glance, it seems straightforward. The type is arranged in a rectangular container and then beaten with ink balls. The paper is placed in a leather-covered frame called a "tympan" and covered by a frisket. The tympan is then laid on the type and fed into a screw press, which is turned to press the type onto the paper.

Simple, right? Hardly.

In fact, every part of the printing process involved years of laborious experimentation: finding the right paper to print on, finding the right moisture levels for the paper to absorb the ink, finding the right way to dry the paper, finding an ink that wouldn't run off the metal type, finding the right alloy for casting the type, and on and on and on. Each problem tested the limits of medieval technology and the limits of Gutenberg's own skill and ingenuity.

And the result was nothing short of a revolution.

How so?

Here, look at this manuscript. What do you see?

If you lived before Gutenberg, you saw a page of text. A totality. A clump of information. But Gutenberg saw something different. His core insight was that a page of text was *not* a thing in itself, but a collection of letters that could be broken apart and rearranged into any other collection of letters.

From *that* deceptively simple observation came *this*. The printed page. Mechanically produced, perfectly identical characters that could be arranged into *any* configuration the printer desires to create any text imaginable.

And *that* insight birthed the modern world.

It birthed the era of mass communication. Pre-Gutenberg, there were no books, no pamphlets, no newspapers. In fact, in the 50 years before Gutenberg, all the scribes in all of Europe struggled to produce 20,000 laboriously hand-copied manuscripts. In the 50 years after Gutenberg? The printers that sprung up around the continent churned out 12 million printed books.

It birthed mass manufacture. Beyond pilgrim badges, there were very few mass-produced items in medieval life. Clothes, tools, shelter, manuscripts—everything was handmade. The book accustomed the medieval mind to the idea of identical, mechanically produced objects. And the printing press—with its mechanically perfect type—prefigured the advances of industrial production.

It birthed the Scientific Revolution. The widespread publication of data, the collection of knowledge in widely available reference books, the ability to exactly reproduce illustrations—things that we take completely for granted today—were a revelation when they appeared in the fifteenth-century and created the conditions for the rise of the empirical method.

It birthed the Reformation. We all know it was Luther and his 95 theses nailed to the church door that launched the Reformation, but it was the *printing press* that allowed Luther's ideas to spread so far, so fast. (And, bonus fact: Those theses were addressed to the Archbishop of Mainz, birthplace of Gutenberg's press.)

The printing press even birthed the nation-state.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, now how would you describe the the impact of the invention of the printing press? Give us some instances of what happened as a consequence of this

MARSHALL MCLUHAN: It created almost overnight what we call a nationalism, what in effect was a public. The old manuscript forms were not sufficiently powerful instruments of technology to create publics in the sense that print was able to do. Unified, homogeneous reading publics.

Everything that we prize in our Western world in matters of individualism, separatism and of a unique point of view and private judgment; all those factors are highly favored by the printed word and not really favored by other forms of culture like radio or earlier even by manuscript.

But this stepping up of the fragmented, the private—the individual, the private judgment, the point of view—all in fact our whole vocabularies underwent huge change with the arrival of such technology.

SOURCE: Marshall McLuhan 1965—The Future of Man in the Electric Age

The world that Gutenberg was born into was *this* world: the real world. If you learned anything at all about this world, you probably learned it from experience, or at least from someone who had that experience.

But the world that Gutenberg left behind was a world of mass communication. Books were no longer a rare and valuable thing, and it was increasingly likely that your information about the world came from someone you never met, someone who may have been long dead.

The movable type printing press didn't just change the way people communicated; it changed what they communicated about.

In a very real sense, the printing press invented "the news."

Before Gutenberg, "the news" was whatever you managed to gather from your neighbours, what you learned from travelers passing through your village, what you heard the town crier yelling through the streets or, at best, what you yourself read in the occasional proclamation or edict from the authorities.

But *after* the printing press, the news was for the first time collected, organized, printed on a regular basis and distributed far and wide.

In 1605, the world's first newspaper was published in Strasbourg—the same city where Gutenberg was making his mirrors for the Aachen pilgrimage a century-and-a-half prior—and soon everyone and their dog was printing a newsletter or a pamphlet or a newspaper or a tract. And these ideas were spreading around the world like they never had before.

For the first time, someone could be reading the exact same news as someone in the next town over . . .

JAMES EVAN PILATO OF MEDIAMONARCHY.COM: . . . or someone on the other side of the planet . . .

. . . at the exact same time.

The printing press united people like never before and the result was an explosion in the spread of ideas, the likes of which would not be experienced again for centuries.

But not everyone was excited about this free flow of information. Entrenched power structures of medieval society—the crown, the church, the feudal lords—had persisted for centuries by controlling information and suppressing dissent. But as the barriers to new ideas collapsed, so did the old feudal order.

It's no surprise, then, that wherever the printing press traveled, wherever the new cadre of printers and booksellers set up shop, the censors were not far behind. When Lutheran books began appearing in England in 1520, Cardinal Wolsey was quick to declare that anyone caught with the texts would be subject to heresy laws. Not to be outdone, King Henry VIII's proclamation "Prohibiting Erroneous Books and Bible Translations" of 1530 afforded him the power to try readers of these "blasphemous and pestiferous" books in his own dreaded Star Chamber.

Parliament dissolved the Star Chamber in 1641, but they weren't about to give up censorship of the press. They just wanted to take the power for themselves, and that's exactly what they did. The Licensing Order of 1643 outlawed the printing, binding, or sale of books, except by persons licensed under authority of Parliament.

This prompted John Milton to write the *Areopagitica*, still recognized today as one of the most influential and passionate defenses of freedom of speech in history:

"Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye."

But even the loftiest language of Milton had little effect in swaying the censors. The Licensing Order was not overturned for half-a-century, when the Parliament chose not to renew the act.

Those in positions of power had good reason to fear the printing press. Gutenberg's invention turned their world on its head. Suddenly, people who had been kept apart and largely in ignorance of the world around them had been brought into a community of readers; a gigantic societal conversation began, empowering radicals who sought to overturn the order that had existed for centuries and helping them to spread their dangerous new ideas faster and farther than they ever could have with pen and paper.

Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that these new ideas would come to their dramatic fruition in one of the most literate places on the planet: colonial America.

By the end of the 18th century, literacy rates in the colonies were upwards of ninety percent, and there were 180 newspapers being published on the Eastern Seaboard, twice as many as in England, a country with twice the population.

The colonists' appetite for books and learning was celebrated far and wide. In 1772, the Reverend Jacob Duché wrote of the colonies: "Almost every man is a reader. [. . .] The poorest laborer upon the shores of the Delaware thinks himself entitled to deliver his sentiment in matters of religion or politics with as much freedom as the gentlemen or scholar [. . .] such is the prevailing taste for books of every kind."

Just four years later, in 1776, Thomas Paine would publish *Common Sense*, a 47-page pamphlet that was to take those colonies by storm. In the first three months of its publication, a staggering 120,000 copies of the book had been sold; by the end of the year, it had sold 500,000 copies, or one pamphlet for every five men, women and children in the colonies. To put that in perspective, adjusted for population, *Common Sense* would be the thirteenth best-selling book of all time.

But this wasn't any ordinary bestseller. This was a revolution.

At the beginning of 1776, before *Common Sense*, the average colonists believed themselves to be Englishmen engaged in a civil war; after *Common Sense*, they were revolutionaries engaged in a War for Independence. And that war was waged on the power of the printed word. *That* is the power of print.

The pen may be mightier than the sword, but the printing press is mightier than entire armies.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a new creature had emerged to capitalize on this new instrument of power: the press baron.

In America, William Randolph Hearst . . . that is, William Randolph Hearst inherited the *San Francisco Examiner* from his wealthy father, built it up into the biggest paper in town and plowed the profits into the purchase of the *New York Journal*. With the *Journal* and a growing number of dailies across the country under his belt, Hearst became a full-fledged press baron, taking on Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* in a circulation war, pioneering the eye-catching layouts and sensational stories that would come to define his brand of yellow journalism, and helping to gin up support for the Spanish-American War, among many other dubious causes.

In England, Alfred Harmsworth picked up the yellow journalism idea from Hearst and Pulitzer and used it to build his own press empire around *The Daily Mail*. From a lower caste of British society, Harmsworth found himself in the center of political power in Britain, using his influence to gin up public hatred of the Huns ahead of World War I, becoming director of propaganda for the government in 1918 and earning himself the title of Lord Northcliffe in the process.

In a sense, the Lord Northcliffes and the William Randolph Hearsts and the other press barons of that era were the end stage of the Gutenberg Revolution. The invention that had given a voice to the masses and started a conversation that would topple institutions, dethrone monarchs and reorder empires had now catapulted people at the fringes of power into its very heart. With the power of the press, these men were able to sway the minds of entire nations of people.

Naturally, the old tension between the ruling elite and the masses, empowered by the press, was still there. But censorship hadn't proven to be an effective tool for keeping the masses in ignorance. There had to be another way.

That way, it turned out, was another conspiracy.

On February 9, 1917, Oscar Callaway, a US Representative from Texas' 12th District, exposed that conspiracy in the Congressional record:

"In March, 1915, the J. P. Morgan interests, the steel, ship-building, and powder interests, and their subsidiary organizations, got together 12 men high up in the newspaper world and employed them to select the most influential newspapers in the United States and sufficient number of them to control generally the policy of the daily press of the United States. [. . .] They found it was only necessary to purchase the control of 25 of the greatest papers. The 25 papers were agreed upon; emissaries were sent to purchase the policy, national and international, of these papers; an agreement was reached; the policy of the papers was bought, to be paid for by the month; an editor was furnished for each paper to properly supervise and edit information regarding the questions of preparedness, militarism, financial policies, and other things of national and international nature considered vital to the interests of the purchasers."

The news was extraordinary, but it almost didn't get reported at all. Callaway had not been given time to make his charges on the floor of the House; instead, they were "buried in the Record." It wasn't until another congressman demanded a full congressional investigation into the charges that the newspapers even bothered to cover the story at all.

Perhaps it is no surprise that the Gutenberg conspiracy ended up here, at the Morgan conspiracy. That a revolutionary step toward freeing man from the bonds of ignorance was met with a revolutionary counteraction designed to place those chains around him all the more tightly. That, at the zenith of the print revolution, the oligarchy finally found a way to control the free flow of information.

Ironic, then, that within the space of a few short years, the print revolution that Gutenberg had started was about to be overturned by another technology. . . .

Part 2 — What Hath God Wrought

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TRANSCRIPT

Hi, I'm James Corbett of The Corbett Report, and I'm not here right now. . . . I mean, there. With you.

Confused? Well, take a look at this . . .

[Steps aside to reveal James in screen] See? But, in truth, I'm not here either. What you are watching are the ghostly reflections of someone far away. I am not in the room with you, but you can see me. You can hear me. You might not think much about this, but . . . [Snaps fingers, revealing green screen set in studio] . . . it is one of the wonders of our era, and it has shaped the world in ways we can barely comprehend.

VOICEOVER: Media. It surrounds us. We live our lives in it and through it. We structure our lives around it. But it wasn't always this way. So how did we get here? And where is the media technology that increasingly governs our lives taking us? This is the story of **The Media Matrix**.

PART 2 - WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT

There's a story about the famous Battle of Waterloo in 1815 that is not usually included in the history textbooks.

The story is that John Roworth—a trusted employee of Nathan Rothschild, the English heir of the infamous Rothschild banking family—was at the battlefield that day and, when the battle was decided and it was apparent that Napoleon had been defeated, he raced off on horseback, bearing the news across the English channel. The messenger arrived at his employers's London office a full 24 hours before the official government courier and Rothschild, always looking for a way to turn a profit, decided to use the news to his advantage. He made a show of selling his shares at the London Stock Exchange and the public, believing the famed stockbroker had received word that Napoleon had won the battle, began selling as well. The stock market plummeted and Rothschild secretly bought up the shares at rock-bottom prices. By the time the news finally reached Londoners that *Wellington*—not Napoleon—was the victor at Waterloo, the coup was complete: Nathan Rothschild was the richest man in the realm.

This story, like so many historical adventure yarns, has been much decorated in the retelling: John Roworth was not at Waterloo, for one thing, and there was no great market sell-off in the hours before the official news of the battle reached London. But the central part of the tale is true: Nathan Rothschild *did* receive early news of Napoleon's defeat and he *did* "do well" by that information, as Roworth admitted in a letter the month after the incident.

But whatever this story tells us about the world of finance, it tells us something more fundamental about something far more important: power. Knowledge is power, and, as we saw in Part 1 of this series, Gutenberg had brought that power to the masses. With the printing press, knowledge could be copied and spread to the far corners of the globe faster and easier and cheaper than it ever had before . . .

. . . but it still had to be carried. On horseback, on foot, by train, by carrier pigeon. Information was still a physical thing and even the news of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo had to be physically transported from one place to another. But did it *have* to be this way? What if information could be communicated directly by electric current and sent across wires or through the air at the speed of light?

Enter Samuel Morse.

Morse was not a scientist or an experimenter, but a painter. He claimed that the idea for sending messages through electrical wires came to him in a flash of genius on a lengthy ship journey from Europe to America in 1832, and thus that *he* deserved credit as the sole inventor of the telegraph.

In reality, research along these lines had been going on for nearly a century. The idea of sending electrical messages through wires was first proposed in *Scots Magazine* in 1753 and it was demonstrated numerous times

over the years—most memorably by Francisco Salvá, who in 1795 connected wires to human test subjects, assigned each of them a letter, and instructed them to shout their letter out when they received a shock.

Ignorant of this history, Morse had to rely on real scientists and inventors for his important breakthroughs. Like Professor Leonard Gale, who helped develop the technique of using relays to help the messages travel further than a few hundred yards. And Alfred Vail, a bright young machinist whose improvements to Morse's crude prototype brought the idea into reality. Many even contend that it was Vail, not Morse, who invented the system of dots and dashes that we know as Morse Code.

Nonetheless, history is written by the winners, and Morse proved to be the winner. Getting the credit, the glory and, more to the point, the patent for the telegraph, Morse received a congressional appropriation of $30,000 to build the first telegraph line from Washington to Baltimore in 1844. He sent the first official telegraph message from the US Capitol to Alfred Vail at a railroad station in Baltimore. The message had been selected by Anne Ellsworth, the daughter of the Patent Commissioner with whom Morse was lodging while he was stationed in Washington. She chose a passage from the Bible fitting of the momentous occasion: "What hath God wrought!"

The passage, from the book of Numbers, is one of praise—rejoicing at the wonders that God had wrought for Israel—and ends with an exclamation mark. But the telegraph message didn't contain punctuation, and so the press misreported the phrase with a question mark at the end: "What hath God wrought?" The medium had already begun to change the message.

It's difficult for us to appreciate just how incredible it was for those who first witnessed communication from a distance with a disembodied electric ghost. In fact, it was almost impossible for people to understand this type of communication in anything but spiritual terms. Even the word "medium" evokes the specter of contact with the spirit world.

When the radio was introduced to Saudi Arabia, the country's conservative Islamic clerics declared it "the devil hiding in a box" and demanded that King Abdulaziz ban the infernal contraption. The king saw the potential use of the radio for the development of the country, but, relying on the clerics for support, he couldn't outright reject their council.

Instead, the crafty monarch proposed a test: the radio would be brought before him the next day and he would listen to it himself. If what the clerics said was true, then he would ban the devil's device and behead those responsible for bringing it into the country.

The next day, the radio was brought before the king at the appointed time. But the king had secretly arranged with the radio engineers to make sure the Quran was being read at the hour of the test. Sure enough, when he switched it on and passages from the Quran were heard.

"Can it be that the devil is saying the Quran?" he asked. "Or is it perhaps true that this is not an evil box?" The clerics conceded defeat and the radio was allowed into Saudi Arabia.

We may laugh, but the Saudis were not the first or the last to mistake media technology for devilry. In 1449, Johann Fust—the scion of a wealthy and powerful family in Mainz—lent Gutenberg an enormous sum of money to start producing his famed Bible and confiscated the books from the printer when he couldn't afford to repay the loan. When Fust later appeared on the streets of Paris, selling multiple copies of Gutenberg's Bible, the bewildered Parisians—who had never seen printed books before and so couldn't imagine how so many strangely identical copies of a manuscript could be produced so quickly—arrested him for witchcraft.

The essence of the mass media—its ability to project the voices of people who aren't there using electronic gadgets and wireless networks—is the essence of magic, bringing to life the scrying mirrors and palantirs of lore. But is this media technology a dark art, or can its powers be used for good?

As the new medium of commercial radio rose in the early decades of the 20th century, listeners had cause to side with the Saudi clerics in their determination that it was, in fact, a devil in a box. Listeners like those who tuned into a strange news report on the Columbia Broadcasting System on the evening of Sunday, October 30, 1938.

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, here is the latest bulletin from the Intercontinental Radio News. Toronto, Canada: Professor Morse of McGill University reports observing a total of three explosions on the planet Mars, between the hours of 7:45 P.M. and 9:20 P.M., eastern standard time. This confirms earlier reports received from American observatories. Now, nearer home, comes a special announcement from Trenton, New Jersey. It is reported that at 8:50 P.M. a huge, flaming object, believed to be a meteorite, fell on a farm in the neighborhood of Grovers Mill, New Jersey, twenty-two miles from Trenton. The flash in the sky was visible within a radius of several hundred miles and the noise of the impact was heard as far north as Elizabeth. We have dispatched a special mobile unit to the scene, and will have our commentator, Carl Phillips, give you a word picture of the scene as soon as he can reach there from Princeton. In the meantime, we take you to the Hotel Martinet in Brooklyn, where Bobby Millette and his orchestra are offering a program of dance music.

SOURCE: Orson Welles War Of The Worlds 10/30/1938

Of course, this wasn't a news broadcast at all. It was the infamous "Halloween Scare," Orson Wells' radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*, which infamously caused panic among some members of the listening audience who were flipping through the dial and mistook the dramatized news "interruptions" for actual reports of a Martian invasion.

It's become fashionable in recent years to downplay the incident as a myth. There was no real scare, only a few dimwits who got frightened. The newspapers—looking for any excuse to belittle radio, its fast-rising competition for the public's attention and corporate advertising dollars—ginned up the story and sold the public on a panic that never was.

But there *was* something to the Halloween Scare. The City Manager of Trenton, New Jersey—mentioned by name in the broadcast—even wrote to the Federal Communications Commission to demand an immediate investigation into the stunt. In response, a team of researchers fanned out, collecting information, conducting interviews and studying reports about the panic to better understand what had happened and what could be learned about this new medium's ability to influence the public.

The team was from the Princeton Radio Project—a research group founded with a two-year, $67,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to study the effect of radio through the lens of social psychology. The team was led by Hadley Cantril, the old Dartmouth College roommate of Nelson Rockefeller who had written in 1935 that "[r]adio is an altogether novel medium of communication, preeminent as a means of social control and epochal in its influence upon the mental horizons of men."

Cantril's report on Wells' Halloween broadcast, *The Invasion from Mars*, concluded that such a large-scale media-induced frenzy could happen again "and even on a much more extensive scale." This was important information for the funders of the Princeton Radio Project; their next major research project was a study of how radio could be used for spreading war propaganda, an increasingly important subject as the world slipped into the maw of World War II.

The question of electronic media's ability to influence the public became even more important as the radio revolution of the early twentieth century flowed into the television revolution of the mid-twentieth century.

Television had actually been ready to roll out as a commercial medium in the 1930s, but the Depression and then the war delayed the mass production of television sets. The first mass-produced commercial television hit the market in 1946, and it soon became one of the most quickly adopted technologies in history to that point, finding its way into the majority of American homes within a decade.

Strangely, as sociologist Robert Putnam documented in his 2000 bestseller, *Bowling Alone*, the era of television adoption precisely coincides with a severe drop-off in civic engagement among the American public. Could there be a relation? If so, what could it be?

One intriguing possibility comes from research conducted by Herbert Krugman in 1969. Krugman—who would go on to become manager of public opinion research at General Electric in the 1970s—was interested to discover what happens physiologically in the brain of a person watching TV. He taped a single electrode to the back of his test subject's head and ran the wire to a Grass Model 7 Polygraph, which in turn interfaced with a Honeywell 7600 computer and a CAT 400B computer. He turned on the TV and began monitoring the brain waves of his subject. He found through repeated testing that "within about thirty seconds, the brain-waves switched from predominantly beta waves, indicating alert and conscious attention, to predominantly alpha waves, indicating an unfocused, receptive lack of attention: the state of aimless fantasy and daydreaming below the threshold of consciousness."

Krugman's initial findings were confirmed by more extensive and accurate testing: TV rapidly induces an alpha-state consciousness in its viewers, putting them in a daydream state that leaves them less actively focused on their activities and more receptive to suggestion. This dream state combines with the nature of the medium itself to create a perfect tool for disengaging the viewers intellectually, removing them from active participation in their environment and substituting real experience with the simulacrum of experience.

In a word, TV hypnotizes its viewers.

NEIL POSTMAN: To begin with, television is essentially non-linguistic. It presents information mostly in visual images. Although human speech is heard on television and sometimes assumes importance, people mostly watch television. And what they watch are rapidly changing visual images, as many as 1200 different shots every hour. The average length of a shot on network television is 3.5 seconds. The average in a commercial is 2.5 seconds.

Now, this requires very little analytic decoding. In America, television watching is almost wholly a matter of what we would call pattern recognition. What I'm saying here is that the symbolic form of television—its *form*—does not require any special instruction or learning.

In America, television viewing begins at about the age of 18 months and by 36 months, children begin to understand and respond to television's imagery. They have favorite characters, sing jingles they hear and ask for products they see advertised.

There's no need for any preparation or prerequisite training for watching television. It needs no analog to the McGuffey Reader. Watching television requires no skills and develops no skills and that is why there is no such thing as remedial television watching.

SOURCE: 2001 | Fredonia Alum Neil Postman On Childhood

As we have seen, it was only a matter of years from the advent of commercial radio as a medium of communication until monopolistic financial interests were funding studies to determine how best to use it to mould the public consciousness. And, it seems, the television—with its brain wave-altering, hypnosis-inducing,

cognitive impairment abilities—was designed from the very get-go to be a weapon of control deployed against the viewing public.

But if these media *are* weapons, if they *are* being used to direct and shape the public's attention and, ultimately, their thoughts, it begs some questions: Who is wielding these weapons? And for what purpose?

This is no secret conspiracy. The answer is not difficult to find. TimeWarner and Disney and Comcast NBC Universal and News Corp and Sony and Universal Music Group and the handful of other companies that have consolidated control over the "mediaopoly" of the electronic media are the ones wielding the media weapon. Their boards of directors are public information. Their major shareholders are well known. A tight-knit network of wealthy and powerful people control what is broadcast by the corporate media, and, by extension, wield the media weapon to shape society in their interest.

In Part 1 of this series, we noted how technological advancements in the printing press and the development of new business models for the publishing industry had taken Gutenberg's revolutionary technology out of the hands of the public and put it into the hands of the few rich industrialists with the capital to afford their own newspaper or book publisher. The Gutenberg conspiracy had led, seemingly inevitably, to the Morgan conspiracy. But that process didn't *end* with the electrification of the media; it *accelerated*.

By the end of the twentieth century, a handful of media companies controlled the vast majority of what Americans read, saw and heard. That this situation was used to control what the public thought about important topics is, by now, obvious to all.

NEWSCASTERS: The sharing of biased and false news has become all too common on social media. More alarming, some media outlets publish these same fake stories — stories that simply aren't true — without checking facts first. Unfortunately, some members of the media use their platforms to push their own personal bias and agenda to control exactly what people think. This is extremely dangerous to a democracy.

SOURCE: ***Sinclair Broadcasting Under Fire for "Fake News" Script***

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, this media oligopoly had cemented its control over the public mind. Combined, newspapers, television, movies and radio had the ability to direct people's thoughts on any given topic, or even what they thought *about*. The zenith of that era was reached on September 11, 2001, when billions across the globe watched the dramatic events of 9/11 play out on their television screens like a big-budget Hollywood production.

But the media was not done evolving. Technologies were already being rolled out that would once again change the public's relationship to the media. Technologies that would once again leave people questioning whether the media was a devil hiding in a box, wondering whether this new media was a tool of empowerment or control, and asking the question: What hath God wrought?

The Media Matrix

Part 2: What Hath God Wrought

Transcript and links: corbettreport.com/media

Next week: Into the Metaverse

Part 3 — Into The Metaverse

Watch on Archive / BitChute / Odysee or Download the video or audio

TRANSCRIPT

VOICEOVER: Media. It surrounds us. We live our lives in it and through it. We structure our lives around it. But it wasn't always this way. So how did we get here? And where is the media technology that increasingly governs our lives taking us? This is the story of **The Media Matrix**.

PART 3: INTO THE METAVERSE

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, if you saw *anything*, read *anything*, listened to *anything*, it was, more likely than not, placed in front of you by one of the handful of corporations that controlled the major television and radio networks, newspaper syndicates, film studios and music companies. These companies didn't control what people *thought*; it was more subtle than that. These companies controlled what people *thought about*.

We all knew the daily news from the newspapers. We all heard the latest Billboard chart topper. We all saw the latest episode of Must See TV and we all knew about the latest Hollywood blockbuster. Even if we managed to avoid these media ourselves, we knew them anyway from cultural osmosis.

Yes, by the year 2000 we had arrived at the pinnacle of mediated reality. The media oligopoly's control of society was complete, and nothing could ever come along to change it.

And then something did.

SINGER: You're riding on the internet! Cyberspace, set us free! Hello, virtual reality! Interactive appetite, searching for a website, a window to the world that to get online. Take the spin now you're in with the techno set, you're going surfing on the internet!

SOURCE: *Kids Guide to the Internet* (1995)

Given that the only thing most people can agree on these days is that the internet is ruining society, it's difficult to remember that the general public's introduction to the World Wide Web was accompanied by a torrent of hyperbole and over-the-top enthusiasm that would make a pimply-faced teenager blush.

The internet was going to solve all of our problems! It was going to democratize information. It was going to give a voice to the voiceless. It was going to bring the world together. And most importantly, it was going to help us order pizza without having to pick up our phone!

[Sandra Bullock orders pizza on the internet.]

SOURCE: *The Net* (1995)

It's easy to laugh at the gee-whizery and pie-in-the-sky promises of the Information Superhighway hype. But make no mistake: the advent of the web *was* a revolution. It *did* upend the economic model that had given rise to the media oligopoly in the first place. And it *did* give a voice to countless millions around the globe who would never have been heard at all if it weren't for the advent of new media platforms.

JAMES CORBETT: This is James Corbett of corbettreport.com, and I'd like to welcome you to a new episode of a completely new news update series that I'm doing with my good friend, and the host and webmaster of mediamonarchy.com, James Evan Pilato. James, it's great to have you on the program today.

JAMES EVAN PILATO: Thanks a lot, man. I've looked forward to doing this.

CORBETT: Yeah, me too. . . .

SOURCE: ***New World Next Week Pilot Episode — Oct. 11, 2009***

As the general public started to get online in the 1990s, not even the wildest flights of cyber-utopian fancy could have imagined the sea change in news and information that was about to sweep over the public. As the printing press had given birth to our very concept of "the news" and as radio and then television again transformed our understanding of what it meant to hear or see the news, so, too, did this new medium change our perceptions of world events and our relationship to them.

Suddenly, "the news" was not something you heard a well-coiffed elderly man in a three-piece suit in a million dollar studio reading to you from a teleprompter. In the online age, the news was as likely to be a story written from home by a guy in his pajamas or a video of a protest uploaded from someone's smartphone or a tweet by an anonymous account. Blogs and websites, and, later, Facebook feeds and Reddit posts, became places people went for news and analysis on breaking events. Information was condensed into memes, and meme literacy became necessary to even understand what was happening online.

And all the while, the media whose hold over the public mind had seemed so unassailable mere decades ago was now old hat, reduced to just another stream of information accessible on the always on, infinite scrolling online content feeds.

But if we have learned anything from this study of mass media history by now, it's that a predictable pattern is at play: a new technology transforms the way people communicate and promises a flowering of knowledge and understanding. The existing power structure then spends all of its considerable resources censoring or co-opting that technology and, ultimately, using the new media as an even more effective tool for spreading propaganda.

As we saw in Part 1 of this series, the Gutenberg press sparked a true revolution, overturning the social, political and economic order and empowering individuals to share ideas on a scale never before imaginable. But we also saw the censors swooping in to repress those ideas before the corporatization of the press finally tamed the mighty juggernaut that Gutenberg had unleashed.

And, as we saw in Part 2 of this series, the commercial radio revolution prompted the Rockefellers and other entrenched financial interests to begin studying how best to use the electronic media to shape the public consciousness. And television, with its ability to put its viewers into an alpha brainwave state of susceptibility, proved to be an even *more* effective tool for the corporate interests that soon monopolized the public airwaves.

The story of the World Wide Web follows a depressingly similar trajectory. Whatever promise the internet held to kick off a new Gutenberg revolution—putting the power of the press back in the hands of the average person—that promise has been consistently betrayed by the the centralization of online discovery and identity into corporations, as even Twitter founder Jack Dorsey now admits.

Perhaps the fact that the web has been so quickly co-opted into a medium of control isn't surprising. After all, the internet is no movable type printing press. However much work went into the design of the printing press, it was still possible for a skilled fifteenth century craftsman to create and operate one with nothing more than the

knowledge of the latest technologies and the capital of a few business partners. But the internet arose not from a medieval tinkerer's workshop, but from the bowels of the Pentagon.

The long history of collusion between Big Tech, the Pentagon and the US intelligence community is by now a well-documented one. The story leads from Silicon Valley—home of Big Tech and the site of much of the research that helped birth the personal computer revolution and the internet—through Pentagon research grants and In-Q-Tel investments to the development of the ARPANet, the birth of the internet, and, eventually, the rise of Google and Facebook and the World Wide Web as we know it today.

The result of that history is apparent to all by now. A medium that should be the most participatory medium ever invented has become a web to trap its audience in an infinite scroll of social media distraction, one designed specifically to keep its users seeking the scientifically scheduled hit of their next dopamine reward.

SEAN PARKER: If the thought process that went into building these applications—Facebook being the first of them to really understand it—that thought process was all about "How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?" And that means that we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever, and that's gonna get you to contribute more content, and that's gonna get you more likes and comments. So it's a social validation feedback loop. I mean, it's exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology. And I think that we—the inventors/creators, you know, it's me, it's Mark, it's Kevin Systrom at Instagram, it's all of these people—understood this consciously and we did it anyway.

SOURCE:* *Sean Parker - Facebook Exploits Human Vulnerability

The results of Big Tech's experiment are now in: the would-be social engineers were successful beyond their wildest expectation. The zombie apocalypse has already happened; in its wake lay the increasingly mechanistic automatons of the social media revolution, eschewing the dull world of human interaction for the cyber world of likes, shares and dopamine rewards. The smartphone has become the digital god of the zombie hordes, demanding we bow down in prayer at every free moment.

Perhaps most frightening of all is the astonishing speed with which this revolution is taking place. As transformative as Gutenberg's press was, it took decades for the technology to propagate out across Europe, and it took centuries for the effects of that technological upheaval to play itself out in the body politic. The electronic media revolution took the better part of a century of development from its earliest iteration, the telegraph, to its introduction to the average person's living room in the form of radio sets, and, later, televisions.

But the online media revolution has happened with astonishing speed. In the span of one decade, smartphones went from curious novelties to ubiquitous items, and they are now on the cusp of being made mandatory for participation in everyday life. This incredible change is already manifesting in a world of profound and rapid dislocations in every facet of our lives: political, economic and social.

So where *is* this revolution taking us? Can we learn to navigate this new world of nearly constant mediated experience? Should we?

To answer that, we need to look at the nature of media itself.

Media, from the earliest smoke signals and scratches in clay tablets to the printed page to the recorded images and sounds of the modern era, has always existed as a means for extending our bodies in space and time. The written word is an extension of our mind out into the world, allowing people in far-distant places and far-off

times to read our innermost thoughts. The phonograph was an extension of our voice, the filmed image an extension of our bodies themselves, permitting them a type of 2D immortality.

But somewhere along the way, the balance between the media and the real world that it represents began to shift. We went from *this* world to *this* world, where most of what we see, most of what we hear, most of what we *think* we know about the world comes not from the people and places that populate our direct, lived experience, but from mere representations.

We have our friends, of course, but we also have *Friends*. We have neighbours, but we also have *Neighbours*. We have something *better* than real life. We have reality TV!

We have entered the world of the simulacrum.

JEAN BAUDRILLARD: Mais dans la définition que j'ai du réel, au sens où je l'ai dit : c'est-à-dire faire advenir un monde réel, c'est déjà le produire, c'est déjà quelque-chose comme un simulacre.

Pour moi, le réel n'a jamais été qu'une forme de simulation. Le principe de réalité, c'est la première phase, si on veut, du principe de simulation, quoi . . . Mon postulat ce serait : il n'y a pas de réel, le réel n'existe pas. On peut objectivement le cadrer, faire qu'il existe un effet de réel, un effet de vérité, un effet d'objectivité, et cetera . . . mais moi je n'y crois pas au réel.

SOURCE: ***Jean Baudrillard — Mots de passe (documentaire 1999)***

At a certain point, the boundaries between the real world and the world of media begin to blur. Is television reflecting the types of people we are, or are we emulating the characters we see on TV? Are the sad songs we listen to the *product* of broken-hearted people or the *cause*?

But if nothing is less real than reality TV, what *is* the reality that that TV is attempting to portray? Does it even exist anymore?

This is no idle question. As pervasive as the online media has become, as important as our participation in that mediated world has become for our daily lives, a new medium has already appeared. The metaverse. Introduced to the public consciousness by the likes of Mark Zuckerberg, the metaverse represents the apotheosis of the media revolution. Soon, the internet will not exist as a cyperspace that we access through our clunky smartphone gadget. Instead, it will be a fully realized, immersive, 3D virtual world that we can literally step into.

No matter our reluctance to enter this virtual world, we will soon, all of us, have the opportunity to enter the metaverse for ourselves, whether by putting on the glasses and adding an augmented reality layer to the world as we know it, or by strapping on the goggles and entering the cyber domain completely. And, after we do so, we may find the idea of living our lives in bare, unmediated reality will be as quaint, as unthinkable, as living in a world of smoke signals and clay tablets.

[Scenes from HYPER-REALITY]

We stand at a precipice. On one side is "reality": the original, authentic, lived human experience.

And on the other side is the metaverse: the world of constantly mediated experience.

In the middle is hyperreality, that blurry space between the real world and the mediated world. And, living as we do on this side of the electronic media revolution, it is the only place we have ever known.

It has been suggested that the metaverse is not a *space*—not a virtual world that we can jack ourselves into and live a virtual life, like in *The Matrix*—but a *time*. Specifically, the metaverse is that time when our digital lives become more meaningful to us than our "real" lives. If that is the case, then who can deny that, for an increasing number of people around the world, that time has already arrived?

In this series we have examined the history of the mass media, from the Gutenberg Revolution to today. But if we don't *understand* that history, then we will be like the ignorant masses identified by George Santayana, condemned to repeat a past that we cannot remember.

From one perspective, the history of media is merely the story of the development of the machinery of communciation. The movement from the printing press to the telegraph to the radio to the television to the internet to the metaverse is a story of technological progress, and each new technology brings us closer to the ideal of total communication.

But there is a more fundamental perspective, one that sees media not as a technology, but as the expression of our need as human beings to connect with others, to fight off our original state as beings cast alone and naked into the world through communion with others. But as our technology of communication begins to create its own world and as we increasingly place ourselves inside that media world, we would do well to ask ourselves, "At what point do we lose our essential nature as human beings? Once we're jacked into the metaverse, are we still *homo sapiens*, or will we have become *homo medias*? Have we considered what that means? Do we care?"

Perhaps it's inevitable that the curved mirror of the Gutenberg conspiracy has finally brought us here, to the black mirror at the doorway to the metaverse. Perhaps we were destined to end up here. Perhaps this is an expression of a fundamental urge that is part of human nature.

Perhaps. But it's also good to know that *this* has an "off" button. That the real world still exists. That you are watching an image on a screen. And that the power to turn it all off is still in our hands.

The Media Matrix

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Series Title Theme "What Hath God Wrought" by KODOMOSAN

Transcript and links: https://www.corbettreport.com/media/